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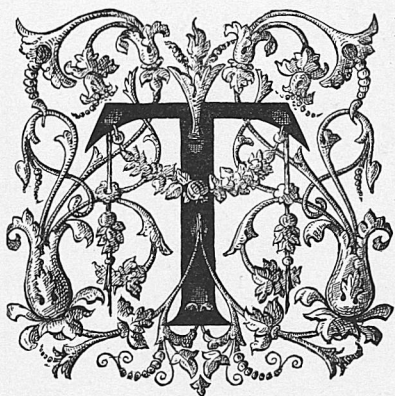
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# THE HISTORY OF WOOD-ENGRAVING IN AMERICA.

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## CHAPTER II.



THE beginning of engraving made by Anderson others followed. He himself had only four pupils: Garret Lansing,—I quote from Lossing,—“of the old Lansing family of Albany; William Morgan, of New York; John H. Hall, of Albany; and his (own) daughter Ann, who became the wife of Andrew Maverick, a copperplate-engraver. LANSING received instructions in the year 1804, and was the second wood-engraver in America.” He returned to Albany, and began business, depending for employment on Anderson, who sent him box-wood and drawings “by the Albany sloop.” In 1806, (still from Lossing,) “he was married to a young lady of wealth, as fortunes were estimated in those days, and went to Boston for the purpose of practising his art there,” but was so little encouraged that he went back, and afterwards made his home in New York. He was “skilful in the engraving of machinery.” I cannot recover anything of his work. MORGAN “engraved well,” but abandoned the graver for the pencil. Though spoken of as Anderson’s favorite draughtsman, he seems to have made no particular impress. Hall I shall have to speak of later.

NATHANIEL DEARBORN, a stationer and printer and engraver on copper, whose card in 1814 bore the words, “Engraver on Wood, School St., Boston,” is said to have brought wood-engraving to Boston in 1811. Drake calls him “one of the first” engravers. He was the publisher, so late as 1848, of *Boston Notions*, projected in 1814 and part-published in 1817, containing (says Lossing) his earlier engravings. I believe, however, that he was only a letter-engraver; and that the first engraver on wood in Boston, entitled to that distinction, was Abel Bowen.

ABEL BOWEN (Abel C. according to Lossing, only Abel on books published by him, A. Bowen on his cuts), was born at Greenbush, opposite Albany, New York; and, after serving an apprenticeship at Hudson, began business for himself as a printer in Boston. He was also an engraver on copper, where or of whom learning the art I do not find,—probably also at Hudson. No doubt his work on copper led to relief-work on metal (in the manner of wood-engraving) for surface-printing, and thence to engraving on wood, which he began to practise in 1812, I believe self-taught. Lossing speaks of “his style” as “more like the English engravings of our day than like Bewick’s”; but this must be taken to mean only that he copied later works as well as Bewick’s. Style can hardly be called his: he was the faithful imitator of the various works which in the course of his business he had to copy. I have before me some cuts for an American edition of the *Young Lady’s Book* (published by him in 1830), containing over seven hundred engravings (including small initial letters), copies of cuts by Thompson, S. Williams, Bonner, and others. Three of them, after those three very different engravers (that after Thompson here given—unfortunately only from a process reproduction, which fails

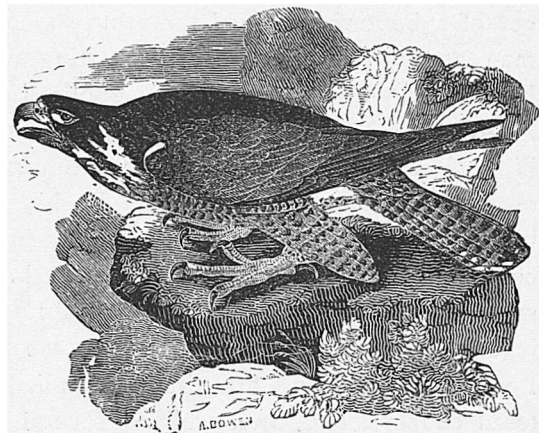
to render its delicacy), are very remarkable for their fidelity to the originals. The distinguishing manner of each engraver is so exactly preserved that I was with difficulty convinced the cuts were not done from transfers. Besides this *Young Lady's Book*, his most important work in engraving, he published several books: the *Naval Monument*, in 1816, copyrighted in 1815, with one hundred and twenty-five engravings, one by Anderson, the rest Bowen's own, the book also compiled by him; *A Topographical and Historical Description of Boston*, in 1817, with cuts from drawings by S. Dearborn; a *History of Boston*, with engravings on wood and metal; also Bowen's *Picture of Boston*, with two copperplates, beside wood-cuts, by himself, and other copperplates by Joseph Andrews, in 1829. The work through all these is very much of the same character as Dr. Anderson's earliest cuts.

In 1810, WILLIAM MASON, a native of Connecticut, introduced the art to Philadelphia. He was soon followed by his pupil, Gilbert. Later I come upon the names of Fairchild, in Hartford; Horton, in Baltimore; Barber, in New Haven. Of the last, still living in New Haven, in his eighty-third year, I am able to give some brief notice.

JOHN W. BARBER was born at Windsor, Conn., on the 2d of February, 1798. When he was but thirteen years old, the death of his father left him as sole support of his family. He worked on their small farm, learned to hoe and dig and plough, to cut wood, milk a cow, drive a yoke of cattle, also to "turn up brick in a brick-yard, and to pound clothes for the women on washing-days." Before then, a studious, thoughtful boy, fascinated by the pictures in his books, he had begun to imitate them,—“at seven years of age” trying his hand on a pen-and-ink design for Nelson's victory at Trafalgar. At East Windsor the then best letter-engraver in the United States, Mr. Abner Reid, had a bank-note engraving establishment, and to him the young farmer was apprenticed. Philadelphian Mason, also an apprentice of Reid's, must have been there not long before him. In 1823, he came to New Haven and took an office for engraving. Since then he has been at once draughtsman, engraver, author, editor, and publisher. The first of his publications was a series of wood-cuts on a half-sheet: *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress exhibited in a Metamorphosis, or a Transformation of Pictures*. Of his many works the principal have been topographical and historical: *History and Antiquities of New Haven*; *History of New England*; *European Historical Collections*; *Collections of Connecticut*; etc. For the Connecticut history, published in 1837, he travelled in a one-horse wagon, collecting materials and making sketches for the two hundred illustrations to the book. From 1856 to 1861 he was preparing *The Past and Present of the United States*, for which he engraved some four hundred cuts from original drawings by himself. I may speak in this place even of his latest works, for they are all of the style and character of the earliest days, without change or improvement. His chief ambition has been, not success in engraving, but to “preach the Gospel



AFTER THOMPSON. — BY A. BOWEN.  
From the “Young Lady's Book.”



AFTER BEWICK. — BY A. BOWEN.

by means of pictures": toward which end he has issued, in addition to his historical, various emblematic books, since combined in a thick octavo volume known as the *Bible Looking-Glass*, of which it must be owned that the pious intention asks more praise than either the designs or the engraving. The cut here given, from *Easy Lessons in Reading*, New Haven, 1824, is a fair sample of his work. He could not be neglected in a history of American engraving.



FROM "EASY LESSONS IN READING."—BY BARBER.

JOSEPH ALEXANDER ADAMS, next of importance in order of time, stands out also as first in talent in our historical course. Nearly all I know of him (self-taught like Anderson and Bowen) I have learned either from his letters to me or in recent conversations with him. He had been so entirely forgotten that I had difficulty in finding that he was yet alive: his name on the books of the National Academy of Design, of which he became an associate in 1841, being only retained because the Academy had not been notified of his death. He was born at New Germantown, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, in 1803; and was apprenticed at an early age to the printing business, having successively three masters, the first failing and the second giving up business. At the age of twenty-one he went to New York, and for three weeks worked there as a journeyman printer. During his apprenticeship he first tried his hand at engraving. A cut of a boot was wanted for some shoemaker's newspaper advertisement, and the printer's foreman attempted to engrave one. Engravers were scarce in those days: only three, I think, in New York,—Anderson and his pupils, Lansing and Morgan. The foreman unsuccessful, young Adams made attempt, and so far succeeded as to satisfy the immediate need and to stimulate himself to further essays, though without any instruction, and knowing absolutely nothing of the ordinary process of engraving. In his own words, he proceeded as follows:—"I intensely blackened the block with India ink, then marked the outlines of the subject with a point, and cut away at it. I had not then even heard of finished drawings being made on the wood. I worked in this manner for about six months. One day Mr. Samuel Wood, a publisher of juvenile books, advised me to go to see Dr. Anderson. I told him I was afraid he might think I wanted to steal his art; but he replied that the Doctor was not a man of that kind. I mustered courage, and, after walking several times to and fro in front of his house, ventured to knock at the door, entered, and saw him for the first time. I found him very pleasant and communicative. He showed me the block he was then working on; and, to my astonishment, I found the whole design was neatly washed on the block, complete, with India ink alone. This was entirely a new idea to me. I went home, and the next day adopted the same plan, which I pursued ever after. The Doctor was very kind to me; gave me many hints, such as lowering parts of the block after the manner of Bewick, so as to print faintly. He also sent me customers occasionally. He laid before me several of Bewick's works which I had never heard of before, and also showed me many other specimens of cuts done by English and old German artists." The cuts done in those days were few, the principal for toy-books and similar juvenile works, published by Samuel Wood, Mahlon Day, Solomon King, and other New York publishers. Now and then a frontispiece or a few cuts in the text of a book would be wanted; but most of the work required was for labels for cotton goods, or soap-stamps, hand-bills, playing-cards, and such like. Books were not profusely illustrated as now,—what illustration was used was generally copperplate; and the young engraver knew what it was to be out of work and at times without a cent in his pocket. But he persevered. In 1831 he was able to make a voyage to England, probably incited to that by the coming to this country, in 1829, of Abraham J. Mason, an English wood-engraver, from whom he may have had introductions to Thompson,

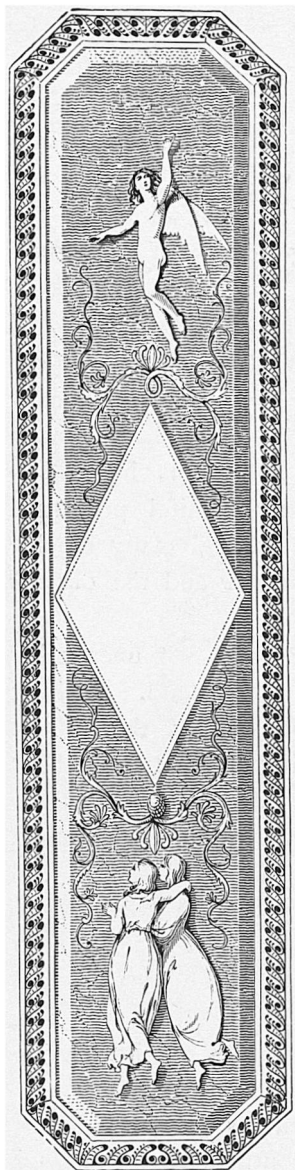
Bonner, and others. He was gone four months, seeing, learning, and his ambition spurred by what he saw to higher effort. Two or three years after his return he drew (a copy from a copperplate) and engraved a frontispiece for the *Treasury of Knowledge*, published in New York by James Conner: on a small duodecimo page a full-length portrait of Washington, in a square  $2\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{3}{4}$  inches, surrounded by circular subjects rather less than a nickel cent, the arms of the thirteen States of the Union entwined with oak and laurel, a figure of Liberty at top,—the minuteness and delicacy of which may challenge comparison with anything I know of in engraving on wood. This was executed in 1834. Not so minute, but of equal excellence, is another frontispiece, of the same size, with figures representing Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and views of Paris, Rome, Calcutta, Cairo, London, and Buenos Ayres. The Washington frontispiece was followed by two cuts for the *Cottage Bible*, also published by James Conner, long since, I believe, out of print. Impressions of these, the *Massacre of the Innocents* and *Jacob's Dream* (the latter after a picture by Washington Allston), drawn on the wood by Adams himself,—not burnished proofs, but prints on hard paper by the hand-press (his own beautiful printing),—I have in my possession, given me by him. His own collection of proofs, and many blocks, were lost in the great fire of 1835. The cuts for the *Treasury of Knowledge* and the *Cottage Bible* were also destroyed by fire some two years later.

The two last-named engravings are of his best, if not his very best work, yet unequalled in this country, and worthy to rank beside the best of the great old time in England. Nothing more sweet or tender has been done than the *Dream*: the figures well drawn; the distant angels rendered more aerial by an almost imperceptible white line, lightening but not destroying the first cutting; the clouds pure in line and fine in tone; the foreground a rich white line; the whole cut as good as if it had been done by Thompson, or Branston, whose style it most resembles. The *Massacre*, after Coignet, also drawn by himself, a bolder cut, is almost if not quite as good. A little figure of a soldier coming down the steps is cross-lined so finely that I did not at first observe the cross work. The intention had been simply to reduce the color, to give air and distance; but with true artist feeling, though the lines were not to be seen, he had been as careful with them as with the first cutting, and they were as well disposed as the first and in harmony with them. No better work, I would repeat, than these two cuts has been done even in the best time of England. Their size is about  $4\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Of about the same date, I imagine, is a vase that I would have taken for Thompson's engraving: I can give no higher praise. A cut of *Canute's Reproof*, and a frontispiece to *Evenings at Home*, both drawn by Chapman, and several other cuts printed on a delicate gray ground, with high lights of white, are equally beautiful and as highly finished. A small cut of *Joshua* commanding the sun to stand still, drawn by Chapman, and engraved for some Scripture story-book, deserves especial notice for the daring use he has made of solid black. In the early part of 1835 he began to copy a series of *Bible Illustrations* published by Seeley, of London, chiefly landscapes about the size of an octavo page, engraved by Thompson, S. Williams, Orrin Smith, Powis, and others. Some eight of these were transferred and engraved by him. One copied from Powis, one of Powis's best landscapes (no man then engraved better landscapes), is so exact to the original, even in character and value and vigor of line, as to be easily mistaken for it. He was to engrave the whole series, but was prevented by the sudden death of his employer. The eight were, I believe, afterwards published along with the originals of the remainder of the series (by arrangement with the London house) by Van Nostrand & Dwight, of New York. I would also note a landscape, of his own putting on the wood, from an oil-painting by Morse, the first President of the National Academy, which in its clearness and purity of line reminds me again of Powis.

One other of his principal works is the *Last Arrow*, engraved in 1837 for the *New York Mirror*, and afterwards printed (Mr. Lossing tells me) in the *Family Magazine*. The drawing is by Chapman; the subject is the pursuit of an Indian by some settlers,—the Indian, on a rock

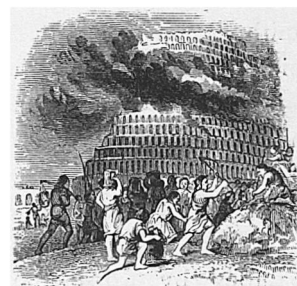




PART OF PAGE BORDER.  
From Harper's Illuminated Bible.

in the foreground, aiming his last arrow at his enemies; a woman with a child in her arms is at his feet. The size of this engraving is  $7\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$  inches. It is bolder in treatment than the *Jacob's Dream*: the two I consider his best productions. I have an impression given me by Mr. Adams, and he has a proof of it. I know not where else it may be seen, except badly printed in the *New York Mirror*, or in Vol. VI. of the *Family Magazine*, wherever those obsolete works may yet be preserved. Proofs and blocks burned, there is little to be got at, unless by chance at some old bookstore, by which the real worth and extent of his work can be fairly estimated. As in the case of Anderson, scarcely anything is accessible even to the most perseveringly curious. Besides himself I have found but one man having any proofs of his cuts. To him, an engraver, of Hartford, Mr. S. H. Clark, I am indebted for sight of some things of which even Adams has not impressions. More may be scattered here and there, and copies may yet exist of the *Treasury of Knowledge* and the *Cottage Bible*; but who can tell where? He is to be known now only by the cuts in the Bible published by Messrs. Harper.

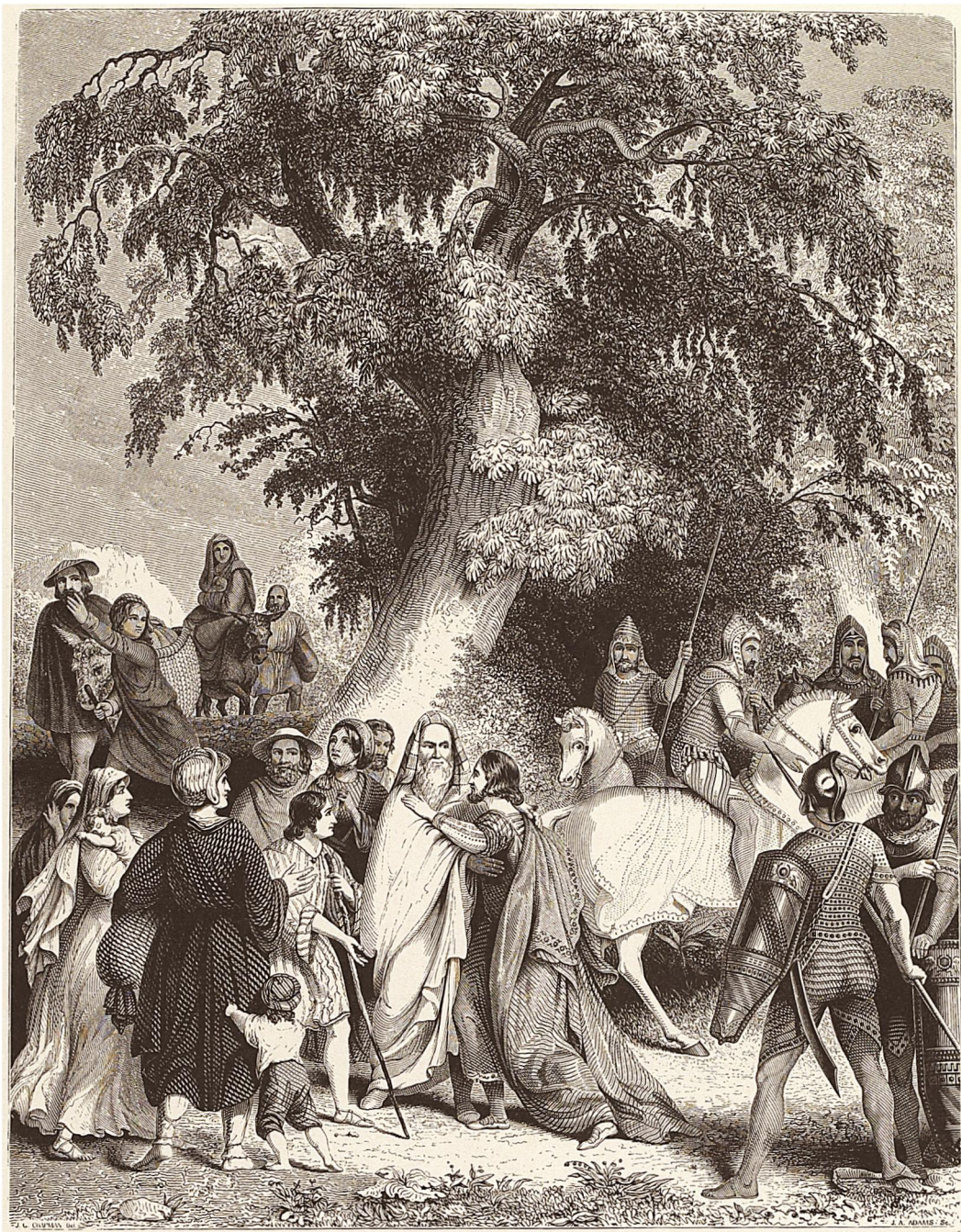
This was projected in 1837, at a time when he wanted employment for his pupils. He thought that an octavo Bible, with a number of small illustrations, would command a sale; and for this he took transfers of some forty English cuts after designs by Martin, Westall, and others. These engraved, it appeared worth while to add to the number. So the project grew; and, being taken hold of by the Harpers, resulted in the larger quarto edition so well known, which yet keeps its ground as the best illustrated American Bible. Its first appearance was in 1843; and it has retained to the present day its original form, "embellished with sixteen hundred historical engravings by J. A. Adams, more than fourteen hundred of which are from original designs by J. G. Chapman." The exceptions are the transfers before mentioned, square cuts, for which, when the intended size was enlarged, Chapman drew a set of elaborately ornamented borders; and the half-page landscape vignettes, also transferred or copied, from cuts after Harvey, these last better engraved than the bordered cuts, as copies from better originals might be. There is none of Adams's own work in these transfers; and the numerous small figure and landscape illustrations by Chapman are all from the hands of his pupils, John Gordon and Robert Roberts, or of other engravers employed by him,—as may be expected, of very unequal



FROM HARPER'S ILLUMINATED BIBLE.

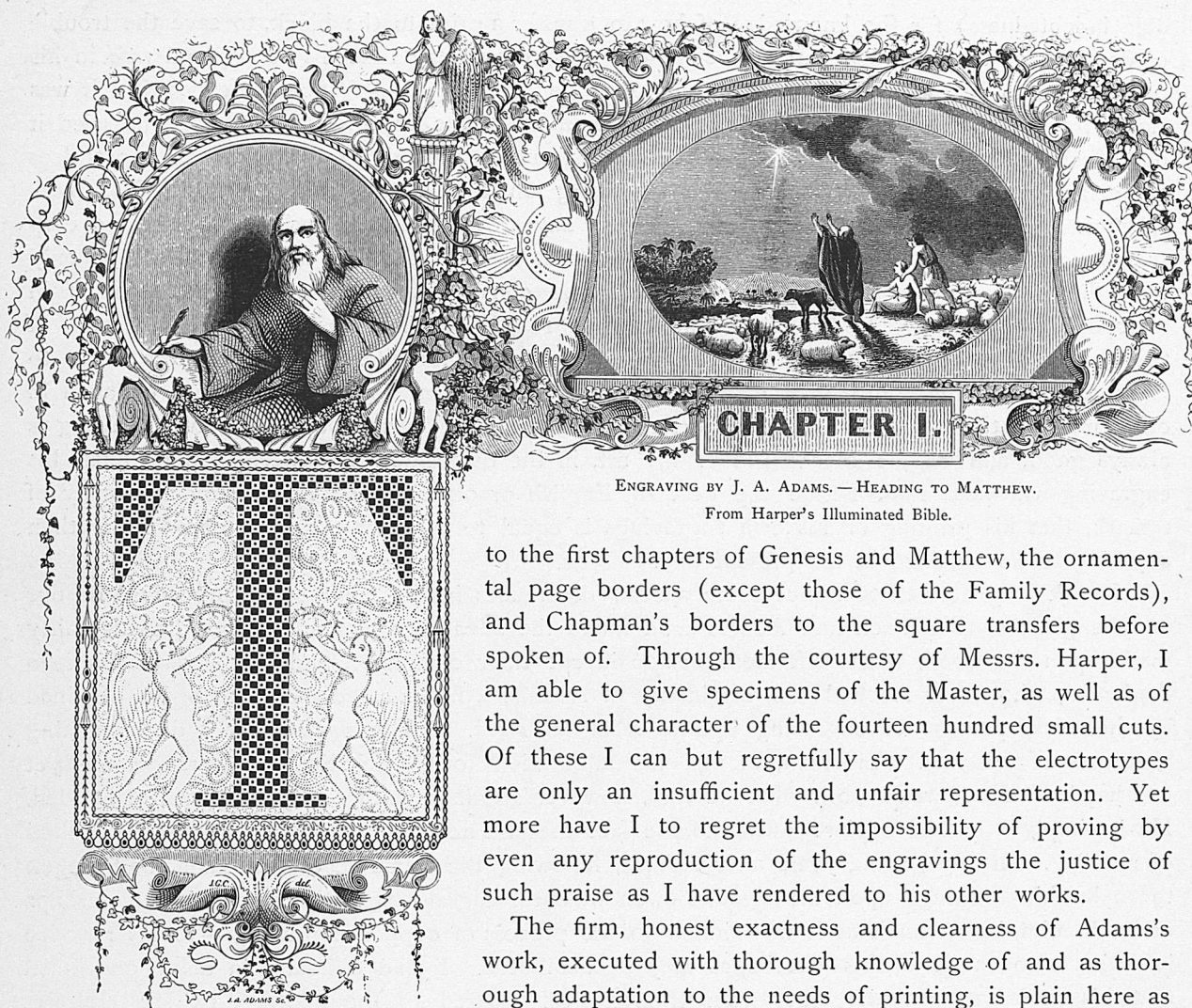
merit, done under his direction only, with perhaps here and there some manual assistance in touching—correction of drawing or improvement in tone or effect. All actually and entirely of his own work are the frontispieces and titles to the Old and New Testaments, the initial headings





MEETING OF JACOB AND JOSEPH.  
ENGRAVED BY J. A. ADAMS.  
FROM HARPER'S ILLUMINATED BIBLE.





ENGRAVING BY J. A. ADAMS. — HEADING TO MATTHEW.  
From Harper's Illuminated Bible.

to the first chapters of Genesis and Matthew, the ornamental page borders (except those of the Family Records), and Chapman's borders to the square transfers before spoken of. Through the courtesy of Messrs. Harper, I am able to give specimens of the Master, as well as of the general character of the fourteen hundred small cuts. Of these I can but regretfully say that the electrotypes are only an insufficient and unfair representation. Yet more have I to regret the impossibility of proving by even any reproduction of the engravings the justice of such praise as I have rendered to his other works.

The firm, honest exactness and clearness of Adams's work, executed with thorough knowledge of and as thorough adaptation to the needs of printing, is plain here as in the engravings I have previously described; and if we miss somewhat of the variety of line and richness of color and tone which I have claimed as belonging to his other works, that is certainly attributable to Chapman, whose precise and mechanical drawing, in formal imitation of copperplate, every line, however delicate, set down with perfect distinctness, required an almost slavish following, which must have sorely tried the patience of the engraver. In objecting, however, to this style of mock copperplate, I must not do injustice to Chapman. His freest drawings were very beautiful. I have one lying before me, the initial heading for the first page of some child's book. It is most delicately, yet firmly drawn, the faintest line sharp and clean, as in an etching, — only some little light tint rubbed in in the background. It would furnish an excellent lesson for the but too often hasty and sloppy draughtsman, a sufficient answer to those who would speak slightly of "only a draughtsman on wood." Drawing, engraving, and printing were all marvels at the time of this book's production; and it well deserved the popularity it immediately obtained, and which it yet holds. It has a special value for the student of American engraving.

In our judgment of Mr. Adams, as of Dr. Anderson, the difficulties he encountered, not only in his first essays in engraving, but when he had reached his full success, must be borne in mind. When his Bible went to press, he had to prepare (technically, to overlay) his own blocks. There was no printer capable of that. Certain improvements, yet in use, in the press itself are also his work. He was the first electrotyper in this country, the inventor also of several improvements in that process. And to him engravers are indebted (though it be but a question-



able indebtedness) for the knowledge of how to transfer a print to the block, to save the trouble of drawing, or to procure a perfect fac-simile. It was for some time his secret, and safe in his power, sure to be only well used, not employed as an aid to idle incompetence; but it was stolen from one of his pupils, and so became common, to the depravation of those who used it out of sheer laziness or for the sake of cheapness, and to the injury of unfortunate apprentices compelled to travel in such fashion (like swimming on corks) to the destruction of all self-reliance. Adams was an artist,—so unharmed by any process. In his early days he was a conscientious and diligent student, drawing from casts and from the life, knowing well that only through artistic study can the engraver claim to be considered an artist, or perfect himself in his special profession. The Bible was published in 1843. The sale was such that his share of the profits gave him means to travel and a competence for life. He made three visits to Europe, and was there altogether eight years. Since his return, his inventive genius engaged in other matters, the world of Art has unfortunately lost him. To sum up, his graver drawing is always good, and in the mechanism of his art, in the disposition and perfection of lines, his engraving will take rank beside the best of English or other work. I may add as worthy of remark, that his printing of his own engravings is equal to the best of any time,—better than anything to be obtained at the present day.

Here it may be well to notice some special differences in the methods of procedure of our early engravers. Anderson and Adams soon found the advantage of having the drawing fairly made upon the wood, which left them free to invent their own lines, and which gave even to Anderson, who never reached the originality of Adams, a free-handedness not to be obtained by their first process of engraving upon a *blackened block*. Adams's work has a distinguishing character of its own. Anderson, though his admiration for Bewick limited his range, was yet free-handed. In Bowen's work what we find, however good, is neither original nor free-handed. He is simply a careful copier: owing to the fact that he never departed from the first method of working. In 1831, some years after Adams, following the example of Anderson, had begun to make his drawings upon the wood, Bowen was still engraving on the black block: perhaps easier to him, in so much as it was similar to the process of copper-engraving,—to his practice in which also much of his excellence may be attributed. I had difficulty in being convinced that his work was not altogether from transfers, till assured to the contrary by Mr. Mallory. He writes to me of the *Young Lady's Book*: "All the cuts were done on a black ground; and all that was done in Boston was executed in that way." "In working on the black ground the copy was reversed by a mirror, and constantly under the engraver's eyes." Mr. Crossman and Mr. Kilburn (with Mr. Mallory pupils of Bowen) confirm his account of the then usual procedure. General outlines being traced, the engraver had but to closely follow, line by line, the original before him,—a method insuring mechanical exactness, but fatal to the individuality of genius, fatal to anything to be called art. Adherence to such a course accounts for Bowen's inferiority to Adams and Anderson. He was, however, a notable man, not only for his own work, so qualified, but also for the pupils who came from him,—Hartwell, the brothers Devereux, Greenough, Croome, Childs, Crossman, Mallory, and Kilburn (the last three yet living). George Loring Brown, the painter, and Hammatt Billings, the architect, began life also as wood-engravers with him.

W. J. LINTON.